

STRATEGIC PLANNING INNOVATION INCUBATOR

FINAL REPORT COHORT TWO – 2025-26



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building on the success of the inaugural pilot, the **PGCPS Strategic Planning Innovation Incubator Cohort II** launched in November 2025 to continue fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement across **Prince George's County Public Schools**. The program provided employees with an opportunity to develop and test creative solutions aligned with district Big Rocks while addressing real challenges impacting students, staff, families, and school communities. While 16 innovators were initially selected, **15 innovators** representing schools and central offices successfully completed the seven-month journey and participated in a structured innovation journey supported by professional learning, mentorship, and peer collaboration.

A key enhancement to Cohort II was the introduction of **Design Thinking principles** at the outset of the program. During the first Innovation Hour, participants conducted empathy interviews and engaged in human-centered problem-solving activities to better understand the needs and experiences of those most affected by the challenges they sought to address. These insights informed the development of their projects before transitioning into the **Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA)** improvement process.

Through five Innovation Hours sessions and ongoing mentor support, participants designed, tested, and refined innovative solutions within their respective areas. The cohort successfully advanced **11 innovative projects** focused on a range of topics, including student engagement, chronic absenteeism, multilingual family outreach, staff collaboration, workforce development, and operational efficiency. These projects demonstrated how small-scale innovations can generate meaningful impact and contribute to broader district goals.

The cohort culminated with the **Innovation Incubator Symposium & Showcase Day**, where innovators shared their journeys, lessons learned, and project outcomes with district leaders, colleagues, mentors, and community partners. The event highlighted the creativity, dedication, and problem-solving capacity across PGCPS.

This report summarizes the Cohort II experience, including program implementation, participant outcomes, project highlights, lessons learned, and opportunities for future growth as the Innovation Incubator continues to expand its impact across the district.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- ✦ Empower PGCPs staff to lead innovative ideas that address challenges in their schools or departments.
- ✦ Foster a mindset of disruptive innovation—solutions that are simple, generate no or minimal cost, equitable, and quick to implement.
- ✦ Uncover user needs by conducting Design Thinking empathy interviews.
- ✦ Build a district-wide culture of continuous improvement through iterative learning (PDSA cycles).
- ✦ Promote cross-departmental and cross-school collaboration to spread impactful ideas.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Timeline:

- Cohort II ran from November 2025 to June 2026.

Application Process:

- The office of Strategic Planning received **35 applications** for the Innovation Incubator. While the program was initially designed to select approximately **10** innovators, the strength of the applicant pool led the selection committee to expand the cohort to **16 participants**. These innovators represented **eight schools** and **four central** office divisions.

Participant Retention:

- One innovator withdrew from the program during the implementation phase due to time constraints, though they expressed interest in a future cohort. As a result, the program concluded with **15 active innovators** leading **11 innovation** projects.

Support Model:

- Innovators were paired with **12 mentors**, including PGCPs leaders and a partner from the University of Maryland.
 - This year featured a new partnership with the Office of Technology Integration & Support.
 - Each project was eligible for up to **\$700** for materials, technology, or professional development necessary for execution.
 - [Toolkit, materials, and templates](#) were provided to support innovators in documenting and presenting their work.
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KEY MILESTONES

- ✓ **Kickoff & Orientation** (November 5, 2025): Innovators were introduced to the innovation framework and connected with their cohort and mentors.
- ✓ **Innovation Hour #1: Design Thinking** (December 3, 2025): Led by Dr. Sarah Thomas, this session focused on the five phases of Design Thinking: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test.
- ✓ **Innovation Hour #2: Empathy & Planning** (January 14, 2026): Participants synthesized insights from empathy interviews to clarify problem statements and initiated the "Plan" stage of their first PDSA cycle.
- ✓ **Innovation Hour #3: Data & AI Tools** (February 25, 2026): This session focused on using formative data to refine project goals. Dr. Sandra Rose joined as a guest facilitator to introduce AI productivity tools and demonstrate practical strategies for using artificial intelligence to support innovation and streamline workflows.
- ✓ **Innovation Hour #4: Mid-Cycle Pitch Session** (April 8, 2026): Innovators shared progress updates, presented mid-cycle pitches, received feedback from peers and mentors, and reflected on lessons learned to strengthen their implementation plans.
- ✓ **Innovation Hour #5: Reflection & Showcase Preparation** (May 6, 2026): This virtual session provided innovators with an opportunity to reflect on their PDSA cycles, discuss implementation successes and challenges, and prepare for the Innovation Incubator Symposium & Showcase.
- ✓ **Innovation Incubator Symposium & Showcase** (June 4, 2026): The cohort culminated in a symposium featuring keynote remarks by Dr. Tara Nattrass, followed by a panel discussion and a Gallery Walk where innovators shared their projects, lessons learned, and outcomes with district leaders, colleagues, mentors, and community partners.



RESULTS AND IMPACT

The following 11 projects successfully utilized the PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) framework to address district challenges with simple, low-cost solutions:

- **ATTEND+** (Dr. Abiola Macaulay, High Point HS): Developed a technology-powered multi-tiered attendance intervention system. The project successfully moved into active testing to address chronic absenteeism by streamlining data-driven supports.
- **BEE: Believe, Elevate, Excel** (Rian Reed, Largo HS): Launched a leadership and etiquette club for an inaugural cohort of eight high school girls. The program was described as having a "priceless" impact on students, fostering a supportive environment for personal growth.
- **From Silos to Synergy** (Candace Slobodnik, Crossland HS): Implemented a professional development series designed to bridge content areas and Career and Technical Education (CTE). The project used Professional Learning Community (PLC) research to improve teacher collaboration and collective efficacy.
- **Aprendamos Juntos-Learning together** (Nancy Ashley, Colin Powell Academy): Hosted a successful Parent Academy event on April 15 for multilingual families in person. The project provided families with educational resource kits to support student learning at home, directly strengthening school-community relationships.





- **Take Flight** (Kia Haselrig-Oparah, Office of Psychological Services): Established classroom "calming corners" to support emotional regulation. The initiative provided resources for special education and French immersion classrooms, teaching students how to use these strategies as part of their daily routines.
- **Specially Designed Social Stories** (Dr. Belinda Sango, Dr. Mike Revell, & James Webb, Special Education Department): Conducted focus groups to identify student needs and piloted an AI-supported social story tool. This project demonstrated how SEL and Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) can work collaboratively to support student growth.
- **Student-to-Staff Bridge Program** (Alyse Montgomery & Lakeysha Littlejohn, Talent and Acquisition Management): Created a recruitment pipeline for graduating seniors. The project distributed "Welcome to PGCPs" resource kits to help new employees successfully transition from student roles to professional positions within the district.
- **Decode & Discover Lab** (Tameca Wood, Mattaponi ES): Developed an after-school program specifically designed to close phonics and fluency gaps for students in grades 3-5.
- **From Strengths to Transformation** (Sharron Knight, Staff Development Center): Implemented a strengths-based leadership framework using Gallup Strengths training. The project focused on building an accountable, inclusive culture by helping staff leverage their individual strengths.
- **Getting the Word Out** (Noelle Royal & Dr. Amy Warren, Office of Instructional Supports, Assessment & Accountability): Designed a system of informational "one-pagers" to simplify complex special education processes and procedures. The project highlighted that even when original goals are adapted, the PDSA process remains a "useful cycle" for discovery.
- **The Whole Child Initiative** (Angela Davis, Forest Heights ES): Created a "Wholeness & Wisdom Hub" focused on supporting the overall well-being of students as a primary strategy to reduce absenteeism.

Key Summary of Results

- Cohort II demonstrated that structured innovation, combined with mentorship and targeted support, can empower employees to move ideas into action. By the conclusion of the program, innovators had successfully designed, tested, and refined solutions addressing a variety of district priorities, including student engagement, chronic absenteeism, family engagement, staff collaboration, and operational effectiveness.
- Participant feedback and project outcomes suggest that these small-scale innovations are already contributing to meaningful improvements within schools and central offices while strengthening a culture of continuous improvement and innovation across PGCPs.

Results and Impact: Quantitative Findings

The following data reflects outcomes for Cohort II and is based on responses from **14** of the **27** mentors and innovators who completed the exit survey.

- Survey Completion Rate: Approximately **52%** of participants provided formal feedback through the exit survey.
- Participant Satisfaction: **100%** of respondents reported they would recommend the Innovation Incubator program to their colleagues.
- Overall Experience: Participants rated the program highly, with an average rating of **4.4** out of **5**, and most respondents selected **5** out of **5**.
- Support from SPRM Staff: Average rating of **4.9** out of **5**.
- Support from Mentors: Average rating of **4.5** out of **5**.
- Implementation Success: **100%** of the **11** innovation projects successfully transitioned into active testing using the PDSA framework.
- Resource Utilization: **7** projects applied and received fundings to procure materials to support implementation and testing.



Qualitative Feedback Highlights

The 14 survey respondents provided critical insights into the program's value:

- **Professional Growth:** Participants highlighted the training on the PDSA cycle and the mentorship model as the most valuable aspects.
- **Meaningful Discovery:** One innovator noted that even when original goals weren't fully met, "discovering other things instead is still a useful cycle" for improvement.
- **Peer Collaboration:** Feedback indicated a strong desire for more informal monthly innovation work sessions to build deeper relationships and provide real-time troubleshooting support among the cohort.



"The most valuable aspects were the professional training on the PDSA cycle and the dedicated mentorship. Additionally, the networking opportunities and the supportive environment that provided a true safety to innovate were incredibly beneficial to my growth." – Innovator

"Going through a guided process with the PDSA cycle. More explicitly, it was valuable to have an improvement framework to work within and having time at innovation hours to engage in some of the work within the cycle. I also really enjoyed hearing from innovators – where they're coming from, the projects they're working on, etc." – Mentor

LESSONS LEARNED

- Beginning with **Design Thinking** created a stronger foundation for innovation. Introducing empathy interviews before the PDSA process helped participants better understand the needs of their end users and refine their problem statements before developing solutions. This resulted in projects that were more user-centered and responsive to authentic challenges.
- The **PDSA framework encouraged continuous learning over perfect outcomes**. Participants recognized that testing small changes allowed them to gather meaningful evidence, refine their ideas, and adapt their projects based on real-world feedback. Several innovators noted that even when their original approach changed, the learning generated through the testing process remained valuable.
- **Mentorship remained one of the program's greatest strengths**. Mentors provided guidance, encouragement, accountability, and practical feedback that helped innovators navigate challenges and maintain momentum throughout the implementation process.
- Dedicated collaboration time is essential. Participants expressed interest in additional opportunities for informal **collaboration and peer problem-solving between Innovation Hours**. Creating structured networking or working sessions may further strengthen relationships across the cohort and encourage the sharing of ideas, resources, and implementation strategies.
- **Providing implementation resources accelerated project testing**. Access to modest funding for supplies and materials enabled several innovators to move more quickly from planning into implementation, demonstrating how targeted investments can remove barriers to testing innovative ideas.
- The program helped **participants recognize themselves as innovators** by providing a structured process, supportive community, and opportunities to test ideas with confidence.



COHORT PROFILE



Abiola Macaulay, Ed.D., ELD Teacher, High Point High School

Disruptive Idea: **ATTEND+** (Technology-Powered Attendance Intervention System), a multi-tiered system of support, is essential to address chronic absenteeism



Amy R. Warren, Ed.D., Instructional Support/Assessment Resource Teacher, DSE in John Carroll ES



Noelle Royal, Itinerant Crisis Intervention Resource Teacher, CCEIS CRT

Disruptive Idea: **Getting the Word Out:** Infographics on Processes and Procedures, to design a system of informational "one-pagers" with key information in an easy-to-access



Angela C. Davis, ELD Teacher & TAG Coordinator, Forest Heights Elementary School

Disruptive Idea: **The Whole Child Initiative.** A Wholeness & Wisdom Hub designed to reduce absenteeism



James Webb, Autism Instructional Specialist, K-12 Special Education Department,



Belinda Sango, Ph.D. Instructional Specialist – Special Education K – 12 Special Education K-12 Instructional Programs



Mike Revell, Ed.D., Instructional Specialist K-8, Specialized Education

Disruptive Idea: **Specially Designed Social Narratives** to demonstrate how specific SEL and SDI strategies work collaboratively for personal growth



Kia Haselrig-Oparah, School Psychologist, Maya Angelou French Immersion School

Disruptive Idea: **Take Flight**, SEL skills-building training to help create and use calming corners



Alyse Montgomery, Recruitment Advisor- Conditional Educator Program, Talent Acquisition and Management



Lakeysha Littlejohn, Recruitment Advisor, Talent Acquisition and Management,

Disruptive Idea: **PGCPS 'Student to Staff' Pipeline** to recruit graduating seniors into full-time PGCPS positions



Nancy, ELD Teacher, Colin Powell Academy

Disruptive Idea: **Aprendamos juntos!**—Learning together Parent Academy Proposal. Three targeted workshops designed for multilingual families



Rian Nichole Reed, Secondary Special Education Chairperson, Largo High School

Disruptive Idea: **BEE: Believe, Elevate, Excel: Self-Esteem and Etiquette Community for Young Women**, an after-school club providing a supportive environment for HS girls



Sharron Knight, Professional Learning Opportunities Advisor, Office of Professional Learning and Leadership

Disruptive Idea: **The Restorative-Strengths Approach for Organizational Culture**



Candace E. Slobodnik, Instructional Lead, SBEL, Crossland HS

Disruptive Idea: **From Silos to Synergy – Bridging Professional Learning**, a monthly/bi-monthly PD series to all content-area and CTE teachers



Tameca Wood, RELA/SS, 5th Grade, Mattaponi Elementary

Disruptive Idea: **Decode & Discover Lab**, an after-school program designed to close phonics and fluency gaps for grades 3–5

To learn more, view the full profile at: <https://bit.ly/SPIICohort2>

MENTOR PROFILE



Brooke Smith

Assistant Program Director & Learning Experience Catalyst Academy for Innovation & Entrepreneurship, University of Maryland



Colin Welch

Strategic Planning Specialist, Strategic Planning and Resource Management, PGCPs



Marson Richardson, Ed. D

Equity Coach
Office of Equity, Diversity, and Belonging, PGCPs



Negasti McCurdie-Wright, Ed. D

Grants Development Specialist, Strategic Planning and Resource Management, PGCPs



Ranae Stradford

Strategic Transformation Partner, Strategic Planning and Resource Management, PGCPs



Olivia Pearson, Ed.D.

College Readiness Supervisor, College Readiness, PGCPs



Andrea Bedenbaugh

Supervisor, Strategic Grants Development and Management, Strategic Planning and Resource Management, PGCPs



Laura Liccione

Improvement Science Instructional Specialist, Dept of Testing, Research, and Evaluation, PGCPs



Melissa Kanney, Ed.D

English Language Development (ELD) Supervisor, English Language Development (ELD) Office, PGCPs



Roderick Adams

Administrator – Compliance and Procedures
Office of Government Relations, Compliance, and Procedures
PGCPs



Sarah Thomas, Ph.D

Instructional Technology Specialist, PGCPs



Bosede Bello

Improvement Specialist, Office of Monitoring & Accountability, PGCPs

To learn more, view the full profile at: <https://bit.ly/SPIICohort2>



THANK YOU

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**WEBSITE**

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**VIDEO**

[Innovation Incubator Highlights Cohort II](#)